

Summer is almost over. School supplies are littering store shelves, happy kids in backpacks are dancing across the TV, and parents are gearing up for the return of first day pictures, school sports, and homework.

Some kids look forward to the start of the school year, but some kids dread it. Even for children who usually enjoy school, the return to schedules, classmates, new teachers, and social and educational challenges can be a source of stress and anxiety.

If your child has experienced bullying, has learning disorders, is changing schools, or has experienced a trauma or major life upheaval, the idea of starting school could be overwhelming.

So what's a parent to do?

Children thrive when we show them that this yearly transition is special and important, and when we help them move smoothly from summer-life to school-life. Consider these tips to help your child prepare for the coming school year...

Set a bedtime. 2-4 weeks before school starts, move your child's bedtime as close to their school-year bedtime as possible. Teenagers need more sleep than elementary-aged children, so adjust bedtimes accordingly. If it's less than 2 weeks - don't worry! Start now. Remember: progress, not perfection!

Establish a bedtime routine.

Children thrive on rituals and routines. This is especially true of children who are highly sensitive, have learning disorders, are on the autism spectrum, have sensory processing disorders, or are in primary and elementary schools.

A warm bath or shower signals the body to sleep as the core temperature cools afterward. Some children need a small snack with a few carbohydrates - like a half a banana with peanut butter, or yogurt with granola. Read a book, sing quiet songs, pray, count your blessings, or meditate, give quiet kisses and hugs and turn out the lights. Strive for a calm, quiet, supportive transition to sleep. Most importantly, stick to your established routine as much as possible!

One important note on sleep and technology: digital screens of all kinds stimulate the brain and make it hard to wind down for sleep. The buzz of alerts can also be disruptive, causing your child to wake up and be tempted to respond. Cell phones, tablets and TVs should be turned off at least one hour before bed, and stored somewhere where kids will not be able to access them until morning. If your child struggles with sleep, visit <https://childmind.org/article/encouraging-good-sleep-habits/> Or talk to your child's therapist or pediatrician.



Honor your family rituals. Mark the transition from summer to school year in a special way. This could be through back-to-school shopping, a road trip, a final big picnic at the beach, an art project, or any number

of things that fit your family culture. Rituals help us move from one stage to another, so figure out what works for you and plan to do it every year.

Set a morning schedule. Pre-plan your morning routine, write it down and post it where the whole family can see it. Getting out the door in the morning can be incredibly stressful, especially if you have kids going to different schools at different times, and you're trying to get to work yourself. Make sure your morning includes breakfast for the whole family! You can save yourself some hassle if you pack book bags and pick out clothes as part of your routine the night before. Include times on your schedule so everyone can look and see what they should be doing and when it should be done.

Preview the school and teacher.

If your child's school offers an opportunity to tour their building and classroom, or meet their teacher, take advantage of it! Having a sense of familiarity with the environment will help ease first-day jitters. Reinforce the idea that school is a fun, safe environment for learning cool new things.

These guidelines are some basic steps you can take to ease the transition from summer break into the school year. They can be customized for the age and functioning of your child, from kindergarteners to high school seniors. If you have questions, or need help planning for your child's success, please consult a licensed mental health professional or your child's pediatrician.

Have a wonderful school year!



Growing Well

Counseling, Consulting, & Training

Jennifer D. Simpson, LPCC-S

440-606-6334

www.growingwell.life

Baker Family Counseling, LLC

Conneaut and Geneva, OH

440-487-7930

www.bakercounseling.org



Back to School Basics

Ease your child into the new school year with a few tips, tricks and hints to conquer anxiety, sleep well, and set the stage for success.